United Nations E/CN.6/2015/NGO/242

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 January 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Union Women's Center, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

14-66576 (E) 160115

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Statement

Commitment to gender equality and the advancement of women's rights

Gender equality is not only a human rights issue, but is also an essential component of sustainable development, social justice, peace, and security. To address the rights of women, Georgia has dynamically carried out complex measures, including the legislative framework as well as the corresponding practices and implementation of all novelties with active participations of the civil society. Georgia belongs to that group of countries were the ideology of gender equality and traditional attitudes are based on gender stereotypes.

The country has endorsed international obligations to fight discrimination against women and has expressed political will by adopting laws addressing gender equality, domestic violence and human trafficking while striving to adopt principles of Democracy. Still these commitments need to be translated more into practice. Georgia's national legislation is not gender sensitive and state policies and strategies lack gender mainstreaming. In addition, stereotypes, deeply rooted gender roles, and women's own lack of awareness of their rights prevent them from fully enjoying their freedoms and rights. The women's movement in Georgia has to be more consolidated and stronger to promote women's advancement.

The Government of Georgia, sought to pursue women's advancement and gender mainstreaming in policy and practice after the 4th World Conference on Women and after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. However, this attempt could not bring any substantive change or real positive development to the status and rights of women in Georgia.

Georgia expressed its readiness to fight discrimination against women and support the establishment of gender equality when it joined the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1994, thereby giving hope to many for a real commitment followed up by concrete steps for achieving greater gender equality in the country. In line with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, Georgia is expected to fulfil obligations endorsed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 for increasing women's role in peace-building and conflict transformation and the Millennium Development Goal #3 on Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women, by 2015. However, women's and civil society groups in Georgia have always criticized these efforts, claiming that the state is not sufficiently committed to accomplishing its international and domestic obligations.

Emerging issues for women in Georgia

Abortion remains the major birth control method in Georgia. Definitely, the introduction of various family planning methods have had a positive impact on the health of women in the last few years, however, many young women still do not have access to information or resources about reproductive health services. Not only does the Government in Georgia neglect to provide sufficient access for youth to family planning and services, but the issue of Reproductive Health of youth itself is not prioritized in the government policies. The two main reasons for these problems

are as follows. The first is related to a strong influence of religion in Georgia. The second is connected with an absence of policy to increase the level of contraceptive use among youth and the absence of youth friendly services coupled with education on Reproductive health at schools and universities.

Early marriage is considered to be one of the major problems. According to the report of Public Defender of Georgia in total 7367 girls were prevented from their education at schools during 2011-2013 year. In case of early marriage boys and girls are forced to stop receiving education at schools and focus on housework or start working.

There is no separate legal provision regarding early marriage in the Georgian Civil Code, but according to the general context it seems that the marriage could be registered even in the case if a person has not reached the age of 18.

It is therefore necessary to carry out educational and prevention activities on child early marriage and to add preventive legal provision regarding early marriage in the Georgian Legislation.

Sex-selection abortion is a cultural phenomenon and indicates that there is gender imbalance in the country. This is harmful for the population and results in further social disorder as well as an increase of crime and violation of human rights, increased trafficking and sexual exploitation. It is necessary to formulate relevant policies and programmes, including population awareness raising, to address the problem and develop institutionalized mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in the health sector.

Domestic violence

In 2006, Georgia adopted Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence. This law was later substantially amended in 2009. These amendments included clauses to strengthen the referral system in cases of domestic violence, and to introduce criminal charges or violations of civil protection orders. Domestic violence became a specific criminal offence in 2012, with the adoption of a package of amendments to the country's Criminal Code. No information was found regarding the existence or otherwise of a mechanism to oversee the implementation of the new criminal law on domestic violence.

A report on domestic violence by the United Nations Population Fund based on survey research published in 2010 found that in practice, the law is poorly implemented, and the national-level mechanism to prevent and respond to domestic violence cases has not been implemented.

Particular attention should be given to the preparation work towards the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

The most efficient way to solve the stereotypical approaches, religious and patriarchal belief, is to integrate gender equality issues into the field of education and public awareness, all groups of society must have equal access. In addition, to improve the legislation with regards to gender equality, National Action Plan, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia must take responsibility to undertake awareness-raising activity, which among other things will be included in curriculum

based programmes at vocational and higher education levels, in re-qualification programmes for doctors and social workers. Gender equality aspects should be considered in developing pre-school concept as well.

Georgia has a sound number of ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority women face cultural and language constraints, violation of human rights and lack of access to information and skills that hinders their integration and development.

Although other minority groups of women, e.g. sexual minorities, manage to organize themselves and cooperate with a few women's Non-Governmental Organizations, they face absolute isolation and discrimination from society.

Due to the two ethnic conflicts, Georgia has a large number of internally displaced persons. The 2009-2012 State Strategy on Internally Displaced Persons has gender aspects, but internally displaced women and rural women are in most vulnerable conditions resulting in low economic status and poverty and having less access to information, rights and skills.

Although Georgia has adopted broad democratic reforms, it has not yet expressed enough commitment to achieving gender equality. While there is a need for more commitment — political, financial and human resources — for addressing broader gender equality issues, instead most of the pressure comes from international organizations. Georgia strives for accession to the European Union, it should note that combating gender discrimination and introducing equality in programs and policies is one of the core principles the European Union considers for future Member States. Adherence to such principles guarantees the establishment of effective and sustainable democracies, inclusive and diverse societies and equal opportunities for community members.

We therefore urge Georgia to base its policies, laws and programmes on gender equality principles. And under the new post 2015 sustainable development framework to further encourage the Government to strengthen initiatives regarding gender based violence, sexual reproductive health and rights of gender equality.